

Biographies of Phasmatologists – 4. William Forsell Kirby.

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Abstract

William Forsell Kirby (1844-1912) was an English entomologist and folklorist. His life and phasmid work is outlined. He described 70 species and 22 genera of phasmids. His *Synonymic Catalogue of Orthoptera* was a complete catalogue of world species that has served phasmatologists for 100 years.

Key words

Phasmida, Phasmatologist, William Forsell Kirby, Biography.

William Forsell Kirby (1844-1912)

William Forsell Kirby, an English entomologist and folklorist, was born in Leicester on 14th January 1844. The son of Samuel Kirby a banker, and his wife Lydia Forsell, he was educated privately, and became interested in butterflies and moths at an early age. After his father died and the family had moved, he joined the Brighton and Sussex Entomological Society. His first published entomological article was in the *Entomologist's Weekly Intelligencer* in 1856. In 1860 he moved and took up a job in London. He was elected as a fellow of the Entomological Society of London in 1861; in later years he was Secretary of the Society. He published a small *Manual of European Butterflies* in 1862 and became acquainted with various famous entomologists, including J.O. Westwood and H.W. Bates.



Figure 1. William Forsell Kirby.

Kirby spent most of 1866 in Germany where he met Johanna Maria Kappel. They married in 1866 and had one son, William, in 1867. In 1867 he became a curator in the Museum of the Royal Dublin Society (later the National Museum of Science and Art), and produced a *Synonymic Catalogue of Diurnal Lepidoptera* (1871) which made him famous in the world of entomology.

He lived in Dublin from 1867 until his appointment as an Assistant at the British Museum (Natural History) in 1879 where he remained until he retired in 1909. On moving back to London he lived close to his friend H.W. Bates for a while; a few years later, in 1896, he named two species of phasmids after Bates. At the British Museum he worked on various orders of insects. He published several catalogues on different orders of insects including Lepidoptera, Odonata, Hymenoptera and Orthoptera, but also published popular books and articles on Entomology including an *Elementary Text-book of Entomology* (1885). Some of his best-known natural history publications include *Manual of European Butterflies* (1862), *Synonymic Catalogue of Diurnal Lepidoptera* (1871), *Hand-book to the order Lepidoptera* (1897), *Familiar butterflies and moths* (1901), *Butterflies and moths of Europe* (1902-04), and the three volume *Synonymic Catalogue of Orthoptera in the Collection of the British Museum* (1904, 1906, 1910).

Kirby had wide interests and exceptional ability as a linguist and philosopher, publishing on general Natural History, Botany, Evolution, Folklore, Mysticism and poetry. He translated (for the first time directly from Finnish, as opposed to from another language) the Finnish epic, *Kalevala the Land of Heroes* into English in 1907. He had a working knowledge of Finnish, Danish, Dutch, German, Italian, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Swedish (Kirby, 1912).

Kirby died on 20th November 1912 in Chiswick, after a short illness and is buried in Chiswick Cemetery. An obituary written by his son (Kirby, 1912) reveals that he was considered a kind, modest, humorous and thoughtful man whose “never tiring assistance to all who required help or counsel endeared him to a large circle of friends and acquaintances”.

Phasmid works

Kirby produced 19 publications dealing with phasmids, although that includes his *Elementary Text-book of Entomology* that only deals with the order in general terms but does illustrate two species (Kirby, 1885, plates 21 & 22). Kirby published 22 new genera and 70 species; these are listed below with references to the page number, and plate number for those that were illustrated.

It was rare for Kirby’s species to be illustrated, only nine species were illustrated when they were described. This could be due to the cost of hiring an illustrator; Kirby did not do any of the illustrations in his phasmid papers. The illustrators of Kirby’s publications were: 1884 (M. Hornman-Fisher), 1885 (not indicated) 1896a (J. Green), 1896c (F.H. Michael), 1900 (M. Hornman-Fisher), 1902b (Howard Knight). Although not illustrated at the time it was originally described, *Clitumnus stilpnoides* Kirby, 1888 was illustrated in Kirby’s 1900 paper (as figure 2.1).

On some new or rare Phasmidae in the collection of the British Museum (Kirby, 1896c) is Kirby’s most interesting paper in several respects. The introduction gives an overview of phasmid collecting which still rings true today: it is still annoying when specimens are decolourised by collectors putting them in alcohol, they are difficult to collect, and they are still little studied. Kirby reports the phasmid collection as filling 120 cabinet drawers “but will soon require to be extended”; the collection is currently being rearranged, when this is complete it will occupy about 500 drawers (Judith Marshall, pers. com., 2006). Kirby referred to the first species described in the paper as *Pharnacia seratipes* (Gray, 1835) but expressed doubt about the identity. It was later recognised as a distinct species and renamed *Phobaeticus kirbyi* Brunner, 1907. The species, from Borneo, was the largest known phasmid at that time, and is still the largest recorded phasmid, although the description of a longer species, also from Borneo, is currently awaiting publication. Kirby’s paper describes two species in the genus “*Hermogenes* Stål, 1875”, in fact this is an error (either by Kirby or perhaps by the printer misreading Kirby’s handwriting), the name of the genus should be *Hermagoras* Stål, 1875; Kirby corrected this in his catalogue of 1904. These two species, *H. hosei* and *H. cristatus*, which Kirby said were “Allied” were found to be the same exactly 100 years after they were first described (Bragg, 1996: 38).

His largest publication on phasmids was in volume one of his *Synonymic Catalogue of Orthoptera* (1904c). Pages 317-423 deal with the phasmids and give a complete list of all known references to phasmids. The eight new species names in his catalogue were shown as replacement names using the standard abbreviation n.n. (nomen novum) which nowadays denotes the replacement of a preoccupied name. However, these are actually new species, not replacement names in the accepted sense, because Kirby was giving a new name to specific material that had been misidentified by other authors. In several of these cases he indicated that there were specimens in BMNH so these specimens are syntypes because they were included in the new species designation (IZCN, 1999: Article 72.4). Similarly, of the four

genera marked n.n. in this book, only *Didymuria* was a true replacement name (for the preoccupied *Diura* Gray, 1833), the others were new genera. The 1904 catalogue is important because it designates the type species for quite a few genera. Kirby's first publication that looked at identifying the type species had been published 14 years earlier (Kirby, 1890) but only dealt with genera described prior to 1840.

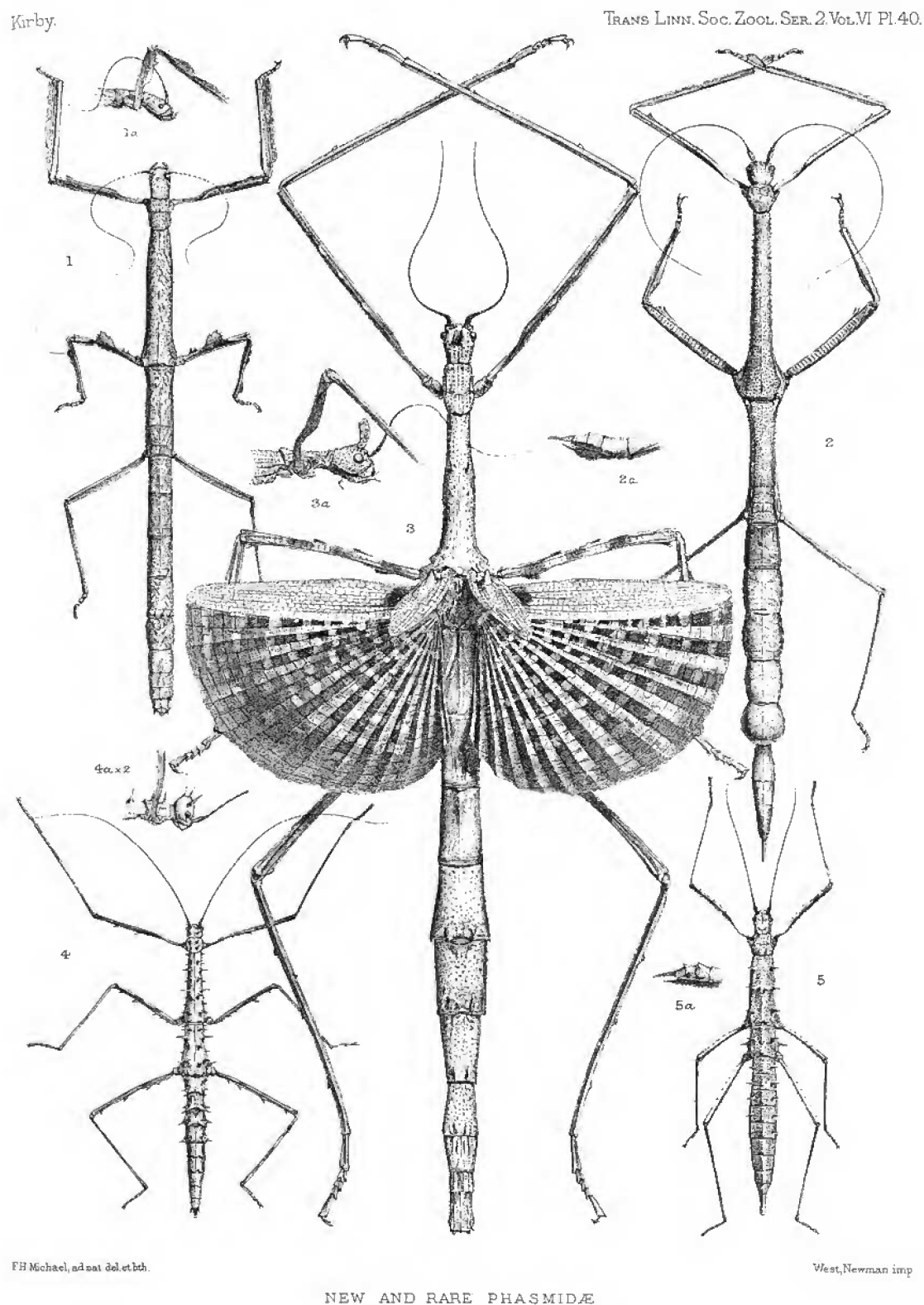


Figure 2. Plate 40 from Kirby's largest phasmid paper of 1896 (Kirby, 1896c).

In 1910 Kirby published the third volume of his *Synonymic Catalogue of Orthoptera* and included one page (p. 569) of corrections to the phasmids. The 1910 volume also includes two interesting notes in Kirby's introduction: "It had been intended to add an Appendix bringing the Catalogue up to date; but this was found to be impracticable, except as regards the third volume; for a Catalogue so largely facilitates work on the groups of which it treats, that it speedily grows out of date, and in many groups treated of in Vols. I. and II. the amount of recent changes and additions has been so large that nothing short of re-editing whole families would be satisfactory." (1910: v) and "Phasmidae. A great monograph on this family has been published by Brunner von Wattenwyl and J. Redtenbacher, *Die Insektenfamilie der Phasmiden*, which supersedes everything previously published on this group."

Alphabetical list of phasmid genera described by Kirby

<i>Abrachia</i>	1889a: 503.	<i>Orthomeria</i>	1904c: 420.
<i>Acanthomima</i>	1904b: 438.	<i>Orthonecroscia</i>	1904b: 436.
<i>Bactricia</i>	1896c: 463.	<i>Phaenopharos</i>	1904b: 433.
<i>Bathycharax</i>	1896a: 259.	<i>Phasgania</i>	1896c: 461.
<i>Chondrostethus</i>	1896c: 455.	<i>Presbistus</i>	1896c: 475.
<i>Didymuria</i>	1904c: 381.	<i>Pseudophasma</i>	1896c: 474.
<i>Enetia</i>	1891: 151.	<i>Staelonchodes</i>	1904a: 372.
<i>Greenia</i>	1896c: 456.	<i>Tersomia</i>	1904a: 431.
<i>Haaniella</i>	1904b: 444.	<i>Trigonophasma</i>	1904b: 436.
<i>Hemipachymorpha</i>	1904c: 341.	<i>Vasilissa</i>	1896c: 468.
<i>Macracantha</i>	1904c: 340.	<i>Xenomaches</i>	1896c: 470.

Lists of Kirby's 70 species grouped alphabetically within each year

1884

moderata (*Necroscia*) 1884: 477, fig. p. 478.

1888

<i>stilpnoides</i> (<i>Clitumnus</i>)	1888: 547.	<i>longiceps</i> (<i>Pseudobacteria</i>)	1889a: 503.
<i>brevicornis</i> (<i>Abrachia</i>)	1889a: 504.	<i>saussurii</i> (<i>Diapheromera</i>)	1889a: 501.
<i>crassus</i> (<i>Pterinoxylus</i>)	1889a: 502.	<i>spinosus</i> (<i>Promachus</i>)	1889b: 230.
<i>insularis</i> (<i>Promachus</i>)	1889b: 231.		

1891

spinosissima (*Enetia*) 1891: 151. |

1896

<i>albopunctatum</i> (<i>Ctenomorpha</i>)	1896c: 472.	<i>moirae</i> (<i>Palophus</i>)	1896b: 463.
<i>australis</i> (<i>Heteropteryx</i>)	1896c: 472.	<i>nigropunctatus</i> (<i>Lonchodes</i>)	1896c: 453.
<i>batesii</i> (<i>Lonchodes</i>)	1896c: 452.	<i>phillipsi</i> (<i>Ischnopoda</i>)	1896c: 467, pl. 40.3.
<i>batesii</i> (<i>Megacrania</i>)	1896c: 471.	<i>sodalis</i> (<i>Dixippus</i>)	1896c: 459.
<i>bogotensis</i> (<i>Stratocles</i>)	1896c: 474.	<i>sordidus</i> (<i>Promachus</i>)	1896c: 463, pl. 40.4.
<i>catori</i> (<i>Lonchodes</i>)	1896c: 454.	<i>spinosissima</i> (<i>Caulonia</i>)	1896c: 464, pl. 40.5.
<i>cornutus</i> (<i>Dixippus</i>)	1896c: 459.	<i>stali</i> (<i>Arrhidaeus</i>)	1896c: 471.
<i>cristatus</i> (<i>Hermogenes</i>)	1896c: 457.	<i>tuberculata</i> (<i>Sthenobaea</i>)	1896c: 462.
<i>episcopalpis</i> (<i>Ischnopoda</i>)	1896c: 466.	<i>virgatus</i> (<i>Lonchodes</i>)	1896c: 452.
<i>everetti</i> (<i>Phasgania</i>)	1896c: 461, pl. 40.2.	<i>walkeri</i> (<i>Vasilissa</i>)	1896c: 469.
<i>granulatus</i> (<i>Bathycharax</i>)	1896a: 259, pl. 12.9.	<i>whiteheadi</i> (<i>Lonchodes</i>)	1896c: 451.
<i>hosei</i> (<i>Hermogenes</i>)	1896c: 457, pl. 40.1.	<i>woodfordi</i> (<i>Chondrostethus</i>)	1896c: 455, pl. 39.1 & 39.2.
<i>insularis</i> (<i>Dixippus</i>)	1896c: 460.		

1902

aculiferum (*Bactrododema*) 1902b: 47, pl. 2.1-2.2.
carinatus (*Hyrtacus*) 1902b: 46, pl. 2.3-2.4.

lugardi (*Bactrododema*) 1902a: 448.
wayi (*Bactrododema*) 1902a: 449.

1904

appendiculata (*Ignacia*) 1904b: 446.
bicolor (*Promachus* ?) 1904a: 377.
brasiliensis (*Tersomia*) 1904b: 431.
brunneri (*Necroscia*) 1904c: 376.
cambridgei (*Pseudophasma*) 1904b: 448.
gracillimus (*Staelonchodes*) 1904a: 373.
haanii (*Necroscia*) 1904c: 376.
horsfieldii (*Necroscia*) 1904c: 376.
inca (*Pseudophasma*) 1904b: 447.
iridescens (*Olcypoides*) 1904b: 445.
janus (*Prexaspes*) 1904c: 415.
laetus (*Promachus*) 1904a: 375.
lamellatus (*Oxyartes*) 1904a: 374.
maculata (*Calvisia*) 1904b: 435.
magnifica (*Eurycnema*) 1904b: 439.
malaccensis (*Agondasoidea*) 1904c: 373.

paradoxa (*Acanthoclonia* ?) 1904b: 444.
peninsularis (*Sosibia*) 1904b: 434.
portentosa (*Eurycantha*) 1904b: 442.
pulcherrima (*Orthonecroscia*) 1904b: 436.
ridleyi (*Bactricia*) 1904b: 429.
ridleyi (*Presbistus*) 1904c: 419.
ruficeps (*Orthonecroscia*) 1904b: 437.
saussurei (*Haaniella*) 1904c: 397.
sifia (*Eurycantha*) 1904b: 443.
spuria (*Eubulides*) 1904b: 441.
tonquinensis (*Necroscia*) 1904b: 437.
viridis (*Lonchodes* ?) 1904a: 373.
viridissima (*Eurycnema*) 1904b: 440.
westwoodi (*Necroscia*) 1904c: 376.
willei (*Eurycantha*) 1904b: 442.

1905

alldridgei (*Palophus*) 1905: 279.



Figure 3.
Bathycharax granulatus Kirby,
 1896b, plate 12, figure 9.

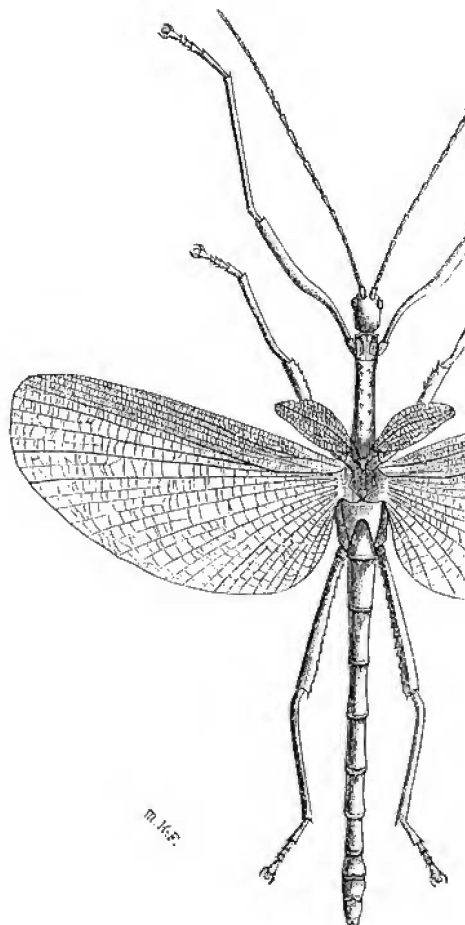


Figure 4.
Necroscia moderata Kirby, 1884, page 478.

Acknowledgements

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Kirby (1885) *Elementary Text-book of Entomology* is available online at:

<http://www.scientiadigital.com/zoologia/KirbyZoo/pag1.shtml> (With phasmids on plates 21 & 22)

Erratum [Issued in *Phasmid Studies* 16(2): 56] — The following reference was omitted:

Kirby, W.F. (1910) An undetermined species of stick-insect found in Devonshire. *Zoologist*, (4)**14**: 197-198.
This paper is the first record of a phasmid living in Britain.